

Leveraging Your Creativity for Business Success

Shannon Bush



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So often health professionals, healers and those in the arts and health field struggle with the business side of their business. They do what they do generally because they have a passion and a determination to share their creative, helping gifts with others. Unfortunately it is often this creative part of them that can be their biggest challenge in business.

To me, as a Transpersonal Art Therapist with a lot of business experience, it seemed obvious to set up my own private practice and therefore my own business. What I hadn't really fully understood at the time was that my creative brain that had actually thrived in the corporate health and business environment I left to start my own

practice would cause me all sorts of challenges. I had moved from a structured and systematic environment where I could freely use my creativity but where there were also clear boundaries in place to ensure performance and outcomes for the clients and the business, to my own environment with lots and lots of freedom. The exciting prospect of being my own boss and having all the time in the world to do what I loved seemed to me to be the golden ticket to a life of joy, where I would be living my life purpose and really sharing my creativity and therapeutic skills within my community.

What happened was quite different. It became apparent very quickly that I had a whole lot of learning to do. With the excessive amount of information that I began to literally download to my creative brain I became very overwhelmed and stuck. I certainly wasn't a living example of being abundant, creative and empowered, the message I thought I was visibly sharing with my current and potential clients. I knew that things had to change and, trusting that I had the answers within, I looked to my creativity and my creative gifts for the key to turn things around. Surely this creative brain of mine, whilst prone to overwhelm, over thinking and getting off task to start another amazing project, was also where I would find the missing piece of the puzzle and get back on track to creating a successful business and life I loved.

I'm delighted to share with you the top three lessons I learnt on my quest to create a successful arts and health business. When you embrace these three lessons you'll find new opportunities to use your creativity as a business asset and not let it become a liability.

1. Create a clear vision for your life and business

This seems relatively obvious but time and time again I see business owners who are self professed creative types struggling to gain clarity in their businesses, so much so that they actually have no vision to work towards. I hear statements like "But I want to do a bit of this, then a bit of that and if this other project comes off, then I'll drop everything else and see where that takes me." This will not get you anywhere.

More than 100,000 individuals in Australia and New Zealand start their own businesses annually

and with the statistics telling us that more than 80% of new small businesses fail within the first few years there are a few things, including the lessons I've outlined here that you need to take heed of if you are to beat those statistics. Your vision might be very clear to you but is it to others? If you haven't got a clear creative vision how can you ever expect to end up with a thriving arts and health business?

To get you started here are a few things critical to include as you define and document your business vision:

- Who you work with. (Don't just say 'everyone and any one' because if you don't specialise, or niche, you risk confusing your clients by being a 'jack of all trades'. People are less likely to want to work with someone who seems to be able to help everyone!)
- Why you do what you do. (Answer the question "Why did I start my business?")
- How much income you will make from your business. (Don't settle for what you earn now and believe that is all that's possible – if you don't aim for more, then you won't earn more.)
- What will I do in my life and business when I am earning this income?
- How will I feel about myself? My business? The fact that I am reaching and helping more people with what I do?
- What sort of support do you need in order to give your best to your life and business? (Be honest here and this exercise will be more beneficial and help you to understand what you need. Then you can make the most of lesson 3 below.)

Embrace your creativity and write out your vision and then capture it with imagery - draw it, paint or collage it and then place it somewhere you can read or see it everyday. It's a well known fact that the human brain processes images at a far greater speed than it does words. Images have great impact and are easier to recall. The saying 'a picture tells a thousand words' supports this. Having a visual representation of your vision is a very powerful way to support your intention to grow your business and be the success you deserve to be.

Your vision is really the expression of your identity, or brand as it is known in business. With 30% of the world's 100 most valuable brands in today's market developed before 1900, the brand or identity you create needs to be a direct

reflection of the clear vision you have for your life and business. It's not something you can ignore.

2. Create a system to capture your inspired moments

"You cannot use up creativity. The more you use the more you have." Maya Angelou

I love this quote! It inspires me to always create, but I am also mindful of the fact that the more I create the more creativity I have at my disposal and the more I will create. With so much happening I have in the past had a tendency to get overwhelmed or unfocused.

I regularly hear clients say they feel that they need to take immediate action on every idea or project they dream up. Sometimes it's because they feel all the ideas they have are great and deserve attention. At other times it might be because things aren't going so well and they are simply grasping at any possible solution to the challenges and concerns that are present at the time. The reality is that this just leads to overwhelm and, if you are already feeling like things are a struggle, you could just end up feeling more drained and despondent when things don't work as you'd hoped and planned.

I find that one of the challenges of being creative is just that, that I am creative and I am constantly creating new things. When I attended a conference last year I filled an entire notebook with additional ideas and creative visions, inspired by the speakers I was hearing and the people I was meeting. This was in addition to the copious notes I took about the actual presentations I listened to. I have always been someone who uses a visual journal, a great habit I picked up at high school from an art teacher who recommended that as a creative person you would benefit from always have somewhere to record your inspired moments. When it came to my business I just applied the same principle.

All of your ideas are valid; they are important. You do not need to take action on them the moment they come into your consciousness. Instead, have a system in place to record the amazing things that your creative brain creates each and every day, your inspired moments.

You can use a note book, sketch book, diary (with plenty of space to write), journal, an on-line system like a personal blog or even a spreadsheet where you record all of your ideas. I've also been known to use the notes function on my smart phone on the odd occasion when I've been caught short without my note book! Find what works best for you and then implement this as a system

for you to keep track of all of your creative ideas. As long as you have them documented somewhere simple and easy to retrieve (and not on a whole lot of sticky notes or pieces of loose paper that can easily get lost) then you can come back to them and implement them when the time is right, or use them to inspire new ideas and projects.

That way if you get any creative ideas (the things in my experience that end up being the real magical gems in my business) you can quickly and easily write down a few notes to come back to at a more convenient time. That way the thoughts aren't lost.

3. Surround yourself with an inspiring tribe

A sense of connection is so important. It provides us with the opportunity to see that there is something greater than ourselves and if that is the case then we are not alone - not alone in life, not alone with whatever challenges or struggles we might have in life and our business. Not being alone means that we don't have to do it all by ourselves!

When was the last time you connected with a group of like-minded souls? How did you feel when you did connect with them? I know that when I connect with the sort of people I call and believe are my 'tribe', I feel alive, exhilarated, passionate and inspired.

Connection provides you with support, inspiration, learning opportunities, reflection, a sense of something greater, someone to bounce ideas off, mentors, guides, encouragement, someone to share the truth with and have the truth provided by (a reality check!) and reinforces belief that you are worthwhile and you are serving others with your business.

One of the best pieces of advice I was given early on in business was to get out there and connect (often referred to as 'networking'). I put myself out of my comfort zone and went to all sorts of events. As I did this, I made new friends and found immense support with other women doing the same thing.

You can build your tribe by:

- Attending networking events for small business owners
- Joining on-line forums and groups focused on your passions
- Participating in events held by your local Small Business Development Centre

- Getting yourself a LinkedIn profile and reach out to others who work in your industry or share your interests
- Taking a course in small business management run by your local council or state Business Development Centre
- Reaching out and inviting people you admire and who inspire you to connect over a coffee or phone call
- Joining and being active in industry groups on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and more
- Creating your own networking group

**Ed. Note: Shannon has asked us to tell readers that she knows the challenges that can arise with being a creative business leader. She says that no matter what they are, her business offers a unique, supportive, empowering, colourful and fun learning experience that can help to quickly turn any issue into an opportunity. She also says that as you learn to leverage your creativity you can begin to quickly experience the incredible benefits that are easily accessible when an innovative and creative approach is adopted and embraced. She invites readers to: Visit www.creativepossibilitycoach.com to request a complimentary Business Success Strategy Session.*